

KENDRICK PARK DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Thursday, March 24, 2011 – 7:00 PM
Large Activity Room, Bangs Center
MINUTES

CITIZEN MEMBERS PRESENT: Peg Roberts, Marilyn Rodzwell, Alan Snow, Hope Crolius, Christina Mata and Susan Sheldon

MEMBERS ABSENT: Liz Rosenberg, Peter Blier

STAFF PRESENT: John Musante, Town Manager (Staff Liaison)
Dave Ziomek, Director, Conservation and Development (KPDAC Member)
Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner (KPDAC Member)

OTHERS PRESENT: Approximately 30 people other than Committee members
See Sign-up Sheet on file in Planning Department

The meeting began at 7:15 p.m. in the Large Activity Room, Bangs Center.

Peg Roberts opened the meeting and gave some background information on Kendrick Park and the design process, including the following:

- It has been 81 years since the beginning of this process;
- In 2007 a group of citizens, at the request of the Town Manager, started considering what should go in Kendrick Park;
- In early 2008, the Town Manager invited residents to join the Kendrick Park Committee; twenty people actively participated, gathering ideas and suggestions from the community;
- The Kendrick Park Committee gathered hundreds of ideas for the 3.3 acre parcel, some of which were for quiet visits and some were for “active” activities;
- The general consensus of the Kendrick Park Committee was that the park should be a multi-use park with multi-use spaces;
- The town put out an RFP for a consultant and received thirteen responses;
- The Cecil Group from Boston was chosen because they had outstanding experience and they listened;
- The Cecil Group’s contract is funded by the Kendrick Park Trust;
- The Kendrick Park Design Advisory Committee (KPDAC) has been working with the consultants to develop recommendations on the design of Kendrick Park;
- The Cecil Group prepared three preliminary concept plans showing alternative approaches to the design of the park, which were presented to the public on February 10;
- The Kendrick Park Design Advisory Committee (KPDAC) received input from the public on these plans and compiled the comments;

Ms. Roberts introduced Steve Cecil of The Cecil Group to make the presentation on the “Preferred Alternative” Plan.

Mr. Cecil introduced his colleague, David O’Connor, also of The Cecil Group. He stated that the Preferred Alternative Plan is a blending of ideas from the previous plans and new ideas. He explained that his firm had developed a “Park Program” which was carefully reviewed at the February 10th public meeting. A Park Program describes what should be in the park and what shouldn’t be in the park. Some things just don’t fit. Programmatic elements need reality testing. He encouraged the public to think about issues related to the park in terms of either the program or the design.

Mr. Cecil explained that the concept plan represents an idea. It is not something that one can give to a contractor to build. He noted that the program is important because the designer needs to know which elements he is including before he designs the park.

Mr. Cecil stated that once the design is complete his firm will provide the town with a cost estimate. He talked about the possibility of phasing the work and where the money might come from, including the possibility that a group such as the “Friends of Kendrick Park” might work on fund raising.

Mr. Cecil and Mr. O’Connor stated that:

- The spaces are designed to be flexible and available for a variety of uses;
- The spaces are defined and connected by pathways;
- Many of the spaces have walkways around the edges;
- There is a path along Triangle Street, on top of a steep hill; the placement of this path will need to be flexible to allow for road widening in that area;
- The pathways allow people to move across the park at different points;
- The mound at the north end is a wonderful feature;
- The children’s play area will not have typical play equipment;
- There will be a low point in the park, as Tan Brook passes under the surface of the park; this area can be a “great lawn” in summer and a skating rink in winter;
- There will be a series of terraces providing seating for a performance space for about 200 people;
- The southern end of the park will be a more formal area, with a bosque of trees and more seating; the area can be converted for various uses, including the Boy Scout Christmas Tree sale;
- A market could occur in this southern area.

Mr. O’Connor stated that:

- We should plan for the market area to be successful and provide parking for it;
- Currently there is parking on the west side of North Pleasant Street; this road could be made one-way northbound and the parking could be moved to the east side;
- Moving the parking to the east side of the road would increase the number of parking spaces, since parking on the east side would not be interrupted by driveways;
- Some of the spaces could be angled parking;
- At the southern end of the park there could be a planter with a seat wall;
- There could also be a small fountain at the southern end for 3 or 4 months of the year;
- There could be a gravel-like material on the ground, like in a Parisian park, with a lawn panel in the center;
- The bus stop could be incorporated into the southern end;
- The space could be delineated by shrubs in planters that would still allow an easy flow of people onto East Pleasant Street.

Mr. Cecil pointed out that:

- Trees appear to be a barrier to movement in plan view, but in reality their trunks are narrow and they won’t block the movement of people in and out of the park;
- The lawn panel could be “structural” lawn;
- A small farmers’ market could fit here;
- Parallel parking spots near the market area would provide a good area for loading and unloading of trucks;
- In the middle of the park there could be a trellis or pergola, which could form the gateway between the two parts of the park;

- A “grand oval” could provide a place for a temporary ice skating rink in the winter and a place to play or picnic in the summer;
- The seating could be fit into the change in grade with a series of terraces;
- The pergola would provide a comfortable place for people to watch and enjoy activities on either side;
- The children’s play space should have low fencing around it and should be close to parking and close to pathways;
- There could be a sculptural theme to the play area, similar to the Dr. Suess Garden in Springfield, with sculptures that could be used as climbing structures; this can be an expensive approach, but there may be sources of funding.

Mr. Cecil stated that:

- Once the program is set and the schematic design has been completed, we can choose the type of play area that we would like to build;
- Donors can endow parts of the park, such as the play area;
- The materials of the play structures can be determined later – bronze or wood or other materials; the choice of materials will determine the cost;
- We want the play area to look finished and not “untidy” when it is not being used;
- The “great lawn” may be an empty space at the north end of the park, but we might consider whether we could uncover granite foundations from some of the old buildings that were removed;
- The foundations, if uncovered, should probably be flush with grade for ease of maintenance;
- Public art is something that can be done over time;
- Walkways or spots at the edges of spaces are good places for sculpture, not in the middle of a space;
- The entrances should reflect what is going on inside the park; if the entries are too elaborate, it may increase expectations that the interior of the park will match the elaborateness of the entries;
- Angled spaces may increase the number of possible spaces, but they can decrease the width of the park and require steeper grading at the edges of the park;
- There is a “critical width” needed for both the “great lawn” and the performance areas;
- Angled parking spaces can be fit into other places along the park edge so they do not interfere with the width required for the great lawn and performance spaces.

Harry Oldham Brooks stated that the big lawn is a grand field and is larger than it looks in plan. He envisioned that as a “small Tanglewood”.

Mr. Cecil stated that:

- A temporary stage can be installed at the top or bottom of the mound area at the north end of the park;
- It is preferable not to have a permanent stage built because it may not be suitable for all of the different types of performances that could be offered.

Mario De Pillis, Sr. stated that he finds the circular forms to be interesting. He asked about the “friendliness” of elements of the park, especially the entries, which appear to be somewhat blocked off.

Mr. O’Connor stated that:

- The circular forms at the north and south ends of the park would be seating walls, in combination with planters; they would be about 20 feet across and could be filled with woody shrubs;

- There would also be benches in the gravel area at the south, about 20 to 24 of them, with tables;
- There is a lot of seating planned for the southern area.

Mr. Cecil referred to William H. White, a writer who studied and wrote about public spaces. According to Mr. White, spaces should look good even if no one is there. Spaces shouldn't look empty.

Mr. O'Connor noted that people like to sit where they can see other people.

Mr. De Pillis complemented the designers on a design that was "well thought out".

Peter Wells stated that he liked the design but he questioned the use of gravel for the walking surfaces, stating that there are maintenance issues with the use of gravel.

Mr. Cecil explained that the gravel being proposed is a granular surface that is plowable and is similar to the crushed stone or rolled gravel that is used in Europe. The goal of the materials chosen for the park is that they are able to be maintained to municipal standards.

Mr. O'Connor stated that the material is a crushed stone with a maximum particle size of 1/8" and a minimum size that can pass through a #200 sieve. It can be raked to smooth it out and plowed in winter. It is a third surface to be considered along with lawn and pavement.

Alan Root stated that a major consideration should be how attractive the park will be to skateboarders. The park design should be defensive, he said. Also, there should be no parking on the east side of the park. Security within the park is an issue and parked cars along the east side will prevent the police from seeing into the park from East Pleasant Street. He liked the design and surmised that the town would need about \$1 to \$1.5 million to build the proposed improvements. He suggested embellishing the southern and northern entries. He asked how it would relate to the Gateway project and recommended that the next round of drawings should show topography.

Mr. Cecil stated that the final package of drawings will have topography. The grading will be similar to what is there today. He stated that the town should be cautious about the costs at this time. Initial cost estimates were based on the three alternatives, to understand if one of the alternatives was more expensive than the others. The three alternatives are "in the same ballpark" with respect to costs. The final costs will be "all in the details". In other words, the final costs will depend, to a large extent on what materials are chosen. The level of "finish" and "artistry" will affect the costs. The Cecil Group will provide a "baseline" estimate with the Schematic Plans.

Mr. O'Connor noted that a previous plan had parking along East Pleasant Street, but that this parking had been taken out.

Bill Elsasser stated that there are two places where young, disadvantaged youth hang out in the center of town – the chess tables at Rao's and the Cousins' Market area, across from Kendrick Park. Kendrick Park is now unused. He cautioned that the town might improve the park and find that it remains unused. He suggested that fountains could be installed to draw children to the park.

Mr. Cecil stated that the intent is to make the park comfortable for everyone. According to William H. White, parks should be safe and comfortable for everyone. There should be no hidden places in the park. Anyone standing in the park should be able to be seen from outside the park. He stated that the playground and the program of the park would make everyone welcome and comfortable. He added that Kendrick Park has never been a park before. It has been more like leftover land, waiting for something to happen. Mr. O'Connor noted that once there is something going on, people will be drawn into the park.

Christina Mata stated that skateboarders are like bicyclists. Where ever bicycles can go, skateboards should be able to go. Kids who skateboard are great kids and generally they don't like skateboard parks.

Mr. Cecil noted that a principle of the park design should be to avoid creating an attractive nuisance. There are parks that are defensively designed and they often have negative effects.

Nancy Gordon stated that there is a problem on East Pleasant Street. The existing path dips down. There is a drop from the curb to the sidewalk. Gravel from under the road accumulates here. Sycamore trees have been planted in this location. Water accumulates in the low spot. There are puddles and lots of gravel. The culvert in that location runs at full capacity.

Mr. Cecil stated that a solution to this problem will be part of the park program. It is an engineering problem that needs to be solved. The consultants will offer recommendations for this problem in their final report to the town.

Pam Rooney stated that there is a lot of traffic on the north side of the park. The park sits up high. There is nothing to welcome people into the park from the northeast corner. It is unwelcoming and undefined.

Mr. Cecil noted that the intention for the entry at the northeast corner is that people should feel that they are in the park immediately.

Dick Howland offered the following comments:

- He lives across the street from the park and often walks there; he has seen lots of users of the park;
- Not many local citizens use the park; most park users are students.
- The town is working on the Gateway project to the north, which will contain more housing for students; the park will provide the only direct route to the downtown area for university students. College students and high school may play hockey on the ice rink.
- We don't know who will be occupying the buildings on the west side of North Pleasant Street in the future; however the Gateway project may encourage the redesign of this neighborhood.
- Food should be available to users of the park.
- Mr. Howland likes the design and suggests that the committee and designers keep in mind the populations that will use the park.
- "The ice rink is a folly; the rest is functional," he said.
- There is a need to cope with students.

Mr. Cecil stated that the idea for the park design is based on multiple paths and multiple rooms throughout the park. It is not intended to exclude people. Maintenance is one of the biggest determinants, he said. We need to consider sustainability. Beautiful lawns that are perfect are a challenge to maintain. We should put our efforts into maintaining specific features. The entire park does not need to be maintained at the highest level.

Mr. O'Connor stated that the skating rink can be temporary, set up with boards and plowed periodically. It doesn't need to be high maintenance.

One person asked how tall the pergola would be and whether it would be an attractive nuisance. Mr. Cecil stated that it would be about 9 ½ feet high and would be designed so that it would not become an attractive nuisance and it would be hard to climb.

Terry Rooney asked about the material of the pathways and why there was no consideration given to a permanent performance space. There is no place in Amherst that has a permanent [outdoor] stage.

Mr. Cecil noted that the paths do not all have to be of the same material. Asphalt unit pavers, as are used in New York City, are attractive and durable. The designers will present a series of choices for

the final design. Brick or granite pavers are very expensive, he said. Mr. O'Connor noted that asphalt that is smoothly done is economical and looks fine. A range of materials can be considered.

Mr. Cecil stated that:

- A traditional proscenium stage is only useful to a small percentage of theater and performance groups; it has a certain scale and height and a lack of flexibility;
- Without a permanent, fixed stage the park can attract more types of theater and performances;
- The scale of performances in this space will be that of people seated in lawn chairs, or on the steps of the terraces; we should plan on about 10 square feet per person;
- There is no parking available for a much larger performance area that can accommodate much larger groups of people;
- For a larger audience, amplification would be necessary;
- There is noise generated along the streets that might interfere with a performance for a larger audience;
- With a smaller space, the voice and non-amplified instruments can be used;
- Amplification would be necessary for a larger area and might bother the neighbors.

Bruce Carson asked about lighting and noted that the park program calls for indirect lighting. He asked about lower-scale, bollard type lighting.

Mr. Cecil stated that with bollard-style lighting the maintenance expenses skyrocket. The designers are proposing pedestrian scale lighting with high cut-offs. The lights will be located along the paths.

Aaron Hayden suggested that there be a covered bicycle rack at the bus shelter. He referred to the portico outside of the Amherst College music building. Such a shelter could be open sided, but would keep rain off the bicycles.

Mr. Cecil noted that there would be a need to coordinate the design of the bus shelter and the bicycle shelter with other elements of the park design. Designers would need to coordinate with UMass transit.

Michael Alpert asked if there could be texture added to the walkways to prevent skateboarding. Mr. Cecil noted that those who have difficulty walking will have difficulty with a roughened walkway surface. We need to focus on smooth transitions to make a walkway universally-accessible and inviting.

Irene Starr asked if the power poles would disappear. Mr. Cecil stated that the goal of the park design is that the utility poles would disappear, but that this may be a long-term goal. It could cost about a million dollars to put the utility lines underground.

Ms. Starr asked about the two big stones with the name Kendrick Park and the statement that the park is a gift of George and Jennie Kendrick, making them sound as if they were husband and wife. We should make it clear that they were brother and sister. Mr. Cecil agreed that it was necessary to "tell the story" of Kendrick Park.

Bill Elsasser asked that the consultants describe the proposed circulation on North Pleasant Street and Mr. Cecil stated that North Pleasant Street would become one-way northbound.

Alan Root asked for an explanation of the process.

Mr. Cecil stated that the consultants and the committee would take comments from the public and make revisions at the direction of the committee. The consultants will prepare a report including the design and costs. The report will be forwarded to the town with ideas for funding. There are opportunities for grantsmanship and fundraising, he said. Refinements will be made to the design and there will be further opportunities for public discussion.

Mr. Root asked about artwork that would illustrate what the entries would look like.

Mr. Cecil stated that a few sketches could be done that would show the basic ideas, but most of the detailed design would happen in the next phase.

Mr. Brooks stated that this is a park with a source of water [Tan Brook]. He strongly suggested that Tan Brook be uncovered and that engineering could help us to deal with the unsavory aspects of the brook, such as smells.

Mr. Cecil stated that this proposal has been debated throughout the planning process. His firm is recommending that the uncovering of Tan Brook not be undertaken as part of the park design. It involves the entire watershed system. The park is not in a position to solve all of the problems of the watershed. The brook is down about 8 or 9 feet and uncovering it would involve creating walls or slopes that would take up a lot of space in the park for a fairly narrow waterway. However, there is a programmatic idea about providing a sign, a symbol or some type of surface representation of the brook to remind people that it is there.

Ludmilla Pavlova-Gillham stated that the design for the northeast corner of the park does not have enough space for a family to wait for the light to change. She suggested expanding the area for people to stand at the corner. Mr. Cecil stated that the area at that entry is wide enough (he estimated 25 feet) and that there would be adequate space to stand.

Ms. Pavlova-Gillham suggested that there be a formal, smaller area near the playground with a place for parents to sit and watch their children play. She thought this was missing from the Preferred Alternative.

Mr. O'Connor noted that the surface of the playground would be something other than grass and that there would be space for parents to sit and watch. The final plan will graphically represent the surface of the play area more realistically.

Ms. Pavlova-Gillham stated that there was no water feature. The closest example of what she was suggesting is Look Park. Children and adults love to see water, she said. She recommended bringing the brook back into the park and controlling it.

Michael Alpert asked about the utilities. Mr. Cecil stated that conduit can be installed underground when the park is built and later on, when there is money to remove the utility poles and place the wiring underground, the wires can be pulled through the conduit without digging up the park.

Mr. De Pillis thanked the committee members for all of their hard work. He stated that, given the challenges, they and the consultants had done a brilliant job. The audience enthusiastically agreed.

Pam Rooney stated that the northeast quadrant of the downtown area was very active. She suggested that there was an opportunity to bring a walkway into the park from that direction. Mr. Cecil agreed that a crosswalk could be added, across East Pleasant Street, to encourage people to enter the park from that part of town.

Mr. Cecil encouraged the group to remember that the park can be modified and improved over time.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted: